

Fairfax County, Virginia

Community Council on Homelessness

**ANNUAL MESSAGE TO THE
BOARD OF SUPERVISORS**

March 27, 2006

Linda Wimpey, Chair
Jane Kornblut, Vice-Chair

Community Council on Homelessness

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Presented by Linda Wimpey, Chair, and Jane Kornblut, Vice Chair

Good morning, Chairman Connolly and members of the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors and County Executive Griffin. Thank you for the opportunity to present this second annual message from the Community Council on Homelessness.

Over the last 20 years we have studied what works, what does not, and what can be done effectively to assist families and individuals to remain housed. We have managed homelessness well but we have not ended it. Ending homelessness in Fairfax is definitely possible. Our goal as a Council is to eliminate the need for a Community Council on Homelessness by eliminating homelessness itself.

The County government cannot end homelessness alone; it needs the help of the private and nonprofit sectors. Homeless families and individuals must be partners with the community in making this happen. With leadership and will, we need not accept homelessness as an unavoidable fact of life in Fairfax. It is possible to do this. All of us need to be bold in thinking of not just how best to provide services for people in need, but to solve the homelessness challenge. We must solve the affordable housing challenge if we are to end homelessness.

We are going to briefly report progress during the past year, made possible by the leadership of the Board of Supervisors, to begin to solve the problems faced by homeless families and individuals and to address the affordable housing challenge.

Last year, when we appeared before you, we identified three priorities:

- A dedicated revenue source for affordable housing
- The needs of homeless medically frail adults and children
- The need for Single Room Occupancy housing (SROs) for single adults

Dedicated source of revenue for affordable housing

Your decision to establish a dedicated source of revenue to preserve affordable housing has had a significant impact in keeping people from losing housing and potentially adding to the homeless population. The lack of affordable housing is the issue that underlies all of homelessness. This dedicated source of revenue for affordable housing is a critical and much needed step in addressing the housing crisis and ending homelessness in our community. Thank you for your bold initiative. This is a great beginning, but much more needs to be done.

Medically Fragile Respite Pilot Program

Thank you for providing \$350,000 for a pilot medical respite program to help address the needs of homeless medically frail adults and children. The program began operation on October 24, 2005, at the Embury Rucker Community Shelter and to date has served 19 persons with an average length of stay of 34 days. Although this pilot program, so far, serves a relatively small number of homeless individuals, it addresses an important need that must be met if we are going to succeed in ending homelessness. We want an appropriate, efficient model of service delivery. The information developed by operation of the pilot will provide a good basis to evaluate what works and what we may be able to do better. The Council recommends continuing the pilot through FY 2007 to generate a full 12 months of data.

SROs

Progress on SROs – or affordable efficiencies as we prefer to call them – has been less successful. The SRO Task Force published and disseminated a report on this housing type. Affordable efficiencies are absolutely essential – and a missing element – of the County's housing opportunities that need to be available for residents with limited income if we are to end homelessness in Fairfax County. We need your help to overcome negative stereotypes about affordable efficiencies.

Hypothermia Response Program

One of the most exciting initiatives in the area of homelessness has been the hypothermia response program, opened in December in the central and western parts of the county and now expanded to the Richmond Highway corridor. Thousands of volunteer hours have been donated to serve between 50 and 90 single adults each evening, but over 200 other individuals were unsheltered on the night of the annual homeless count in January of this year.

The Faith Communities opened their doors, provided food and volunteers and a caring response. My experience as a core facilitator at two venues mirrored that of many of the volunteers. We recognized that homeless persons are people with deep human needs just like you and me. Some have mental health and addictive behavior problems, but each one deserves a safe place to live. The hypothermia response is an incredibly strong indication of the Fairfax community's will to partner with County Government in helping meet the need for appropriate, affordable housing for single adults. But they too have asked: "What more can we do as a Faith Community in partnership with the County?" Representatives from these Faith Communities were here today and received recognition from the Board. Thank you.

This hypothermia program points clearly to the need for affordable efficiencies and "housing first" options in our County. Providing simple, affordable private units where persons who are homeless are housed and then linked to needed services has been extremely successful in other communities. We believe the time has come to add "affordable efficiencies" as a housing type in Fairfax County. One way to reassure neighbors that the residents of affordable efficiencies will strengthen local communities is to develop and operate a project so that fears about negative impact on neighbors and housing values can be proven unfounded. We ask the Board to direct staff to help select a County-owned site so that a pilot project can be planned and funded.

New Family Shelter

We look forward to the long-awaited groundbreaking for the Katherine K. Hanley Shelter. We commend the County Executive and members of his staff who have worked to carry out the Board's mandate. This shelter will help keep dislocated families in their community. However, this shelter will not be able to serve all of the families on the waiting list for shelter, which has run as high as 90 families in the past year. We need to work on effective solutions to ending and preventing these large numbers of families from becoming homeless. Overcrowding is a serious issue in Fairfax and is too often the market answer to the lack of affordable housing.

Preserving Affordable Housing

You were right a year ago. The Penny for Affordable Housing Fund works. This approach to preserving affordable housing works well. Good uses for the fund were found and found quickly.

We commend the Board for the quick and successful response on the Winkler sale. This quick action preserved the affordability of 180 out of over 900 units in the Winkler sale in Fairfax County. We encourage the Board to set aside 20 percent of the units in the Winkler deal for very low income residents – an important step to ending homelessness.

Preserving affordable housing may be the most efficient way to keep individuals and families housed. But, the fund can be more successful in helping end homelessness by providing resources for new development, such as the affordable efficiencies initiative. The housing preserved and developed with help from the fund needs to reach the lowest income residents of the County who cannot afford market rents.

The families and individuals with well below 50 percent of median income need to be beneficiaries of this Fairfax housing initiative. In the fund's first year, NO units have yet been preserved for this segment of our community. The Council urges the Board of Supervisors to direct Department of Housing and Community Development to ensure that at least 20 percent of the housing that is funded next year through The Penny for Affordable Housing Fund reaches the very lowest income households in our community.

The Council also urges the Board to consider dedicating a second penny to The Penny for Affordable Housing Fund. We understand the challenge facing the Board in trying to keep the tax burden affordable for residents. We believe the community will support this modest increase in effort for affordable housing if they know the money has been well spent and if they understand how much can be accomplished with additional resources. We ask the Board to direct the Department of Housing and Community Development to prepare a long term plan to develop sufficient housing for families and individuals to permanently house all of those currently homeless in Fairfax. This plan should make use of surplus land owned by the County that may be appropriate for housing development.

We encourage the Board to urge the Affordable Housing Advisory Committee to focus on affordability for lower income persons and those with special housing needs in the future. We thank the Board for establishing The Penny for Affordable Housing Fund in fiscal year 2006 and for taking full responsibility for the use of this fund.

This past year the Council's major focus has been a planning process to develop a plan to end homelessness. Jane Kornblut chairs the Planning Committee to End Homelessness. Jane will update you on that work.

Ending Homelessness in Fairfax County

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development requires the Fairfax County Continuum of Care to prepare a plan to end chronic homelessness for single individuals within 10 years. We appreciate the federal government's priority, but that direction is not enough. We believe a more ambitious goal is appropriate for our community: to include our homeless families. Now is the time to be creative and bold. It is time we moved from managing homelessness to ending homelessness. *Managing homelessness is not enough!*

To that end, the Community Council on Homelessness formed the Planning Committee to End Homelessness, comprised of 15 community, nonprofit, and government representatives. It began work in July, first reviewing the work of other communities to develop similar plans. The Planning Committee to End Homelessness has developed a vision: "By 2015, every person in Fairfax County has a Safe Affordable Home." We can end homelessness in this County if we have the political and moral will as a community to do so. We thank the Board of Supervisors for your endorsement of this effort and Chairman Connolly's initiative to convene *A Community Summit to End Homelessness: Creating a Blueprint for Success*, scheduled for April 7. The Freddie Mac Foundation and Freddie Mac Corporation are sponsoring this day-long event at the Freddie Mac headquarters in Tyson's Corner. The summit will bring the community leaders together to develop strategies to prevent and end homelessness. Your participation and support are critical to our success in preventing and ending homelessness. We encourage each of you to attend.

The adoption and implementation of all successful plans to end homelessness across the country have had two critical elements: 1) Strong political leadership from the very beginning of the planning process, and 2) participation by all segments of the community – government, community based organizations, civic associations, businesses, formerly and currently homeless persons and citizens at large – in meaningful ways – in the development and implementation of the plans. With broad based community participation and committed political leadership, our plan will succeed.

Again, we want to thank Chairman Connolly and the entire Board for your past support for our homeless families and individuals and for your commitment to affordable housing.

FACTS

- Homelessness has remained consistently high during the past several years:

Year 2006	934 individuals	1,143 persons in families
Year 2005	800 individuals	1,149 persons in families
Year 2004	816 individuals	1,110 persons in families
Year 2003	769 individuals	1,175 persons in families
Year 2002	782 individuals	1,285 persons in families
- A survey conducted on January 25, 2006, of all known homeless county residents identified a population of 934 single individuals and 1,143 persons in 333 families, including 419 adults with 724 children. Average family size was 3.43. These numbers do not account for families and individuals who are at risk of becoming homeless, or who live in doubled- or tripled-up housing situations.
- The number of homeless single individuals increased by nearly 17% over 2005, from 800 to 934 persons. Within this group, the number of literally homeless persons living on the street, in shelters, or transitional housing increased from 564 to 667 (+18%), and individuals living in permanent supportive housing increased from 236 to 267 (+13%).
- Housing challenges for working singles and persons with disabilities are ever more daunting with rising rents and limited subsidies for single persons. In March 2006, the HUD fair market rent for an efficiency apartment increased by 3.6% to \$948 per month, and the one-bedroom fair market rent has risen 3.3% to \$1,080 per month.
- The fair market rent cost for two bedroom and larger units, which decreased slightly between 2004 and 2005, has risen again by an average of over 3%. In March 2006, the fair market rent for a two-bedroom unit is \$1,225, for a three-bedroom unit it has risen to \$1,580 per month, and for a four-bedroom unit it is \$2,068 per month.
- The waiting list for the family shelters averages 60 or more families (up to 90 at one point), but these shelters can only accommodate about 35 families at one time. It can take three to four months to get into a family shelter. The new Katherine K. Hanley family shelter will help to address this need.
- There is mixed news in the County's Housing Choice Voucher Program. In recent months, there has been some turnover in vouchers, enabling households on the waiting lists to again be served. No new vouchers have been awarded to Fairfax County for several years, limiting the ability of the County to assist people on waiting lists, including homeless families in shelters and transitional housing who are ready to move to permanent stable housing. In addition, the FY 2007 HUD budget again proposes a block grant approach to the Housing Choice Voucher program, which the housing industry views as a way to make the program an easier target for reductions in the future since the budget would no longer be tied to specific numbers of families being assisted, but to the bottom line – the total cost of the program.

Community Planning Collaborative on Homelessness
Community Council on Homelessness
Excerpt of By-Laws on Background, Mission, and Functions

Article I. Background

The Community Planning Collaborative on Homelessness is a process that was established in 2004 to ensure that the County and the community support policies, programs, and services that prevent homelessness and meet the needs of those families and individuals who become homeless. The Collaborative encompasses two major bodies, the Council and the Forum. The Council is the leadership component that provides governance and guidance for the community process. The Forum involves all parties in the community who have an interest in or provide services related to addressing homelessness and ensures that the Collaborative is a consensus driven process. Together the Council and the Forum conduct the necessary business and work to support the broad purposes of the Collaborative.

Article II. Mission

The Community Council on Homelessness provides leadership to prevent and end homelessness in the Fairfax-Falls Church Area.

Article III. Functions

- Provide oversight and governance to the community planning process.
- Educate and advocate for appropriate policies, programs, and services to best address homelessness.
- With input from the Community Forum on Homelessness, adopt annual goals and objectives.
- Provide direction to standing committees to ensure that their work supports the mission of the Council.
- Ensure coordination and communication with and among the standing committees.
- Develop strategies to address resource issues to prevent and end homelessness.
- Promote best practices, encourage training, monitor performance, resolve problems, and establish a project prioritization process that best reflects the needs of the community.
- Use data to assess the availability of resources, identify gaps, and forecast future needs to guide decision-making.
- Identify opportunities and encourage the development of new programs, initiatives, and pilot projects that will provide housing and needed services to families and individuals who have become homeless or are becoming homeless in our community.
- Provide an annual report to the Board of Supervisors on the state of homelessness.
- Maintain representation and linkage to other County boards and committees to ensure that issues and concerns affecting homeless persons are considered in decisions about services and programs.

COMMUNITY COUNCIL ON HOMELESSNESS STATEMENT OF VALUES

These values inform and guide the Council as it moves toward accomplishing its mission and vision.

- We value everyone in our community, recognizing the right of all people to have a safe, affordable place in which to live.
- We value diversity, believing that communities are strengthened when people connect across differences.
- We value excellence and are committed to finding creative, bold solutions for both housing needs and support services.
- We value an inclusive process that respects all points of view and a balanced approach to the issues.
- We value education and advocacy and its power to impact public policy in ways that achieve a vision of a community without homelessness.

COMMUNITY COUNCIL ON HOMELESSNESS

Ambassador Josiah Horton Beeman, Community Services Board

Mrs. Marlene Blum, Citizen

Mr. Louis Edwards, Citizen

Ms. Donna Foster, Citizen

Rev. Clevester Hawkins, Faith in Action, The First Baptist Church of Vienna

Ms. Carol Hawn, Federation of Citizen's Association

Mr. Verdia L. Haywood, Deputy County Executive

Mr. Dean Klein, Freddie Mac Foundation

Ms. Jane Kornblut, Citizen, *Vice-Chair*

Ms. Sheri Link, VCH Board & North Star Network

Ms. Pam Mitchell, New Hope Housing

Mr. G. Bud Pope, VOA-Bailey's Community Shelter

Ms. Lynn Thomas, Christian Relief Services

Ms. Sarah White, Our Daily Bread

Mr. Peyton Whiteley, Legal Services of Northern Virginia

Ms. Linda Wimpey, Citizen, *Chair*